

BSA Climate Change Study Group Launch Event. British Library, January 17<sup>th</sup> 2010.

The seventy hardy souls who made it through the rain and gloom of a January Monday morning to the inaugural event of the BSA Climate Change study group were treated to a vibrant and stimulating day. The launch event took place at the British Library, in the same hall as the 2010 BSA Presidential Event 'How to put society into climate change'. It was at the Presidential Event that the suggestion was made that a climate change study group be formed. That was nearly a year ago, and that the launch event happened at all was due to the hard work of Elizabeth Shove (Lancaster University, and convenor for the study group), Tom Hargreaves (UEA and treasurer for the study group) and Jessica Paddock (Cardiff University). The study group event preceded and dovetailed with the **"Climate Change and Everyday Life: How the social sciences can help policy"** extraordinary lecture and exhibition of ideas, put together and performed by members of the ESRC 'Social change, climate change' working party. A video of the extraordinary lecture will be available at <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/staff/shove/transitionsinpractice/tip.htm>. This latter part of the day was a huge success, and whilst worthy of its own write-up, I will instead concentrate on highlighting the main points from the study group part of the day.

The programme ran from 10.00am until 4pm and was very much an interactive affair, requiring input, ideas and feedback from the attendees. The primary purpose of the day was to generate suggestions about what issues the study group should focus on, and how it should operate. Speakers from different research backgrounds and different disciplines gave a series of short 20 minute presentations in order to stimulate discussion and thoughts about the sort of work the study group could do. The talks were focussed on the themes of food, mobility and governance. These topics were not chosen to define the limits of the study group's work, but to provide examples of the types of themes which might be deemed interesting and useful to work on.

Dale Southerton (University of Manchester) and Jessica Paddock kicked off the presentations with talks on the relationship between food, social practice and climate change. These talks highlighted the important role food production and distribution plays both in overall emissions of greenhouse gases, and the configuring of everyday practices. Lunch was sandwiched between two talks on mobility and climate change. Tom Birtchnell (Lancaster University), in a highly innovative and dynamic power point presentation, explored how ideas of mobility in India were changing, and how the Tata car company used images of the family to promote car sales. Rachel Aldred (University of East London) brought us back closer to home with a discussion of her research into the social practices of cycling, and what elements are involved in making bike use feel and appear normal.

Lunchtime provided an opportunity for delegates to visit the 'Social Change, Climate Change' working party's Exhibition of Ideas. Here the themes of food and cycling, alongside examination of practices such as showering and washing clothes, were explored through a range of interactive displays. These displays allowed study group members to engage with the themes raised in the talks in more depth. The exhibition boards are available at: <http://www.lancs.ac.uk/staff/shove/lecture/lecture.htm>

After lunch two talks on governance provided perspectives from outside of sociology and offered a broader context for the preceding discussions of practice. Graham Smith (University of Southampton) examined how political science examinations of climate change governance intersected with sociological analyses. Whilst recognising the difficulties of interdisciplinary working

Graham identified opportunities for sociology to work with political scientists on better understanding of the connections between transformations in everyday practice and governance. Adrian Smith (Science and Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex) ended the presentations by talking the audience through a heuristic model designed to help researchers and policy makers understand where innovations in energy systems and energy use appear and how such niches can develop into meaningful interventions.

The presentations were interspersed with opportunities for the audience to provide feedback in two ways: first, audience members were asked to work together to generate creative suggestions for the future activities of the study group; second, the audience were provided with post-it notes on which to write down questions for the panel discussion which rounded off the day. The study group was blessed with some esteemed company for this last session; Owen Dowsett (ESRC Research Development Manager), Tara Garnett (Founder, Food Climate Research Network, University of Surrey), Jim Skea (Research Director, UK Energy Research Centre) and John Urry (Lancaster University). The panel members held a widely divergent set of expectations about the contribution sociology can make to the climate change debate. Jim Skea felt that policy makers had a tendency to limit the involvement of the social sciences to economists, an imbalance which was considered by both Jim and John to be unhealthy. Jim stressed the need for researchers to avoid 'polysyllabic' language if they wish to have their message heard by policy makers. Owen, John and Jim all felt the social sciences, including sociology, had a potentially important, but as of yet unrealised, contribution to make to realising the government's targets for climate change, though Tara thought that in order for sociology to be relevant to climate change discussions it was necessary for sociologists to find productive ways of working with the life sciences. Owen echoed Tara's point, highlighting the desire of the ESRC to see evidence of interdisciplinary working in the research proposals they received, whilst recognising the considerable difficulties this posed to academics. Challenging questions were raised about the suitability of the current academic structure for responding to the challenge of climate change. Questions were also asked about the radical agenda often associated with sociology, and whether a radical sociology would always find itself ignored by the mainstream of decision making. Tara and Owen felt that it is important for researchers to work with the situation as it is, and that many key changes are incremental. All in all, this very stimulating panel discussion raised many questions for the study group to address.

The launch event successfully achieved, if not exceeded, its goal of generating ideas and suggestions for the future direction of the study group. The next stage for the group is to go through the feedback received on the day, and through the mailing list, and formulate a programme of activities which can carry forward this agenda in line with the preferences expressed in the feedback forms.

For details on future climate change study group events visit <http://www.britisoc.co.uk/specialisms/climate.htm> or join our mailing list, over 100 strong and still growing!

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